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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005482

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI ELECTION DECREE ADVANCES AMID CAMPAIGN  
FREEDOM CONCERNS

REF: BANGKOK 5332 (ELECTION CLOCK TICKING)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On October 16, the Thai cabinet approved a decree scheduling a December 23 general election for an expected royal endorsement. The Election Commission has ruled that a banned politician acted legally when he campaigned for the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party (PPP), opening the door to campaigning by other banned politicians. PPP also overcame initial opposition by television authorities, and was able to air its first campaign ads, although only after removing some language deemed offensive by the censorship board. End summary.

CABINET APPROVES DECEMBER 23 ELECTION DECREE

1. (SBU) On October 16, the Thai cabinet officially approved the draft royal decree proclaiming a general election for December 23. The draft decree has been sent to the King for an expected October 24 endorsement. The decree's promulgation will set in motion a timetable for candidate and voter registration as stipulated in recently passed election laws (reftel), and will allow political campaigning to officially begin.

2. (U) Also on October 16, the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) approved a plan to divide the country into eight geographic regions for the election of party list members. Under the new constitution, each region will contribute ten party list seats to the 480-member parliament. MPs from electoral districts will constitute the remaining 400 seats in the legislature. Parliamentary candidates will be able to register between November 7 and November 16.

BANNED POLITICIANS PERMITTED TO CAMPAIGN

3. (U) Following the dissolution of the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party and the five year "political ban" of its executive board, there was speculation that these leading politicians

would be banned from all political activity, not just leading political parties. On October 11, the ECT announced that Newin Chidchop, a former executive of the dissolved TRT party, had not violated the law when he spoke at a September campaign event for the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party (PPP). The ECT publicly said Newin had a right to express his ideas under constitutional freedom of speech protections.

14. (C) Former TRT supporters told us this week that the ECT decision will encourage other banned members of TRT's executive board to participate in the campaigning. Thaksin stalwart Chaturon Chaisaeng, who like Newin is also banned for five years, is reportedly scheduled to campaign in Chiang Rai on October 18 with PPP leader Samak Sundaravej. Paveena Hongsakula, a former TRT member, told us she plans to campaign for the Chart Thai party despite being similarly banned.

#### ALLEGED CAMPAIGN AD CENSORSHIP RESOLVED

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15. (C) PPP officials publicly complained that on October 12 the Television Advertising Censorship Board prevented three campaign ads from airing. The ads reportedly praised the policies of the TRT. A Motherland Party advertisement was also reportedly banned amid board concerns that the advertisement was "likely to divide society", forcing party officials to edit portions of the advertisement. (Note: campaign advertisements by other political parties, including those led by former TRT members, have been broadcast on television and radio in recent weeks without reported restrictions. End note). The ECT and the government denied

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all responsibility for preventing the PPP ads from airing. The initial excuse given by the Censorship Board to bar the PPP ads was that they had to be approved by the ECT -- a claim the ECT denied. There followed several days of confusion over who was responsible for the ban.

16. (C) The Deputy Spokesperson of the PPP told us on October 17 that the board has subsequently approved modified versions of the PPP ads, and they are now airing. The spokesperson believes the government did not directly influence the censorship board's decision to prevent the PPP ads from airing, and that television authorities may have practiced self-censorship when they decided not to air advertisements. He elaborated that the censorship board objected to statements in the ads where the PPP promised to "regain the honor of the nation and restore the happiness of the people." According to the Deputy Spokesperson, the board rejected the premise that the nation's honor or the people's happiness had been lost and required restoration.

#### COMMENT

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17. (C) In both these cases, the PPP was able to conduct its campaign activity, but it faced questions or obstacles that had to be resolved. We can anticipate this pattern will continue during the election campaign, as PPP activities will be viewed with significantly more suspicion and trepidation than those of other parties. PPP is also more likely to have a provocative message that may result in overt censorship or the more subtle self-censorship that is a pervasive problem in the Thai media.

BOYCE